

BUILDING A TIMELINE FOR MARKETING SUCCESS

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PLAN

If you organize your marketing processes, and map out projects from concept to completion and beyond to actual performance metrics, all your initiatives—from media kits to editorial calendars to events—will be much more effective.



Whether launching a special calendar, an event, a new magazine section or on-line presence, it's near impossible to be effective without knowing what to say, when to say it and whom to say it to. A well developed and executed marketing timeline is the key to success in today's market, where publishers need to do more with fewer resources and deliver bigger results.

A good marketing timeline will encompass many elements, as most marketing efforts have multiple moving parts, including multiple delivery channels. "It's important to keep the plan simple and easy to execute," says Brad Stauffer, print and e-media consultant as well as associate publisher for Los Angeles-based lifestyle publication Singular Magazine and president of the Western Publications Association. To get started, he recommends creating a one- or two-page plan that is easy to follow for everyone involved and stays true to the brand and the objectives of the campaign. "Too many times people spend resources, energy and valuable time planning to plan," he says. Once you have a foundation, build out the plan from there and keep a master plan to oversee the entire project.

10 COMPONENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL TIMELINE

- 1. TO START, SET THE STRATEGY.** Creating the overall strategy is the most important step in the process and needs to be done first.
- 2. DEVELOP MESSAGING.** Before discussing specific tactics, all internal parties must agree on the messaging around the new program. Be "on message" with overall brand messaging and strategy.
- 3. BUILD A SCHEDULE.** Work backwards from the launch date and move upstream, identifying the weeks out from launch that each significant element needs to be done.
- 4. BUILD A SUB-TIMELINE** for each significant element, and assign interdisciplinary staff to move the process forward.
- 5. CREATE THE COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS.** Use all of the tools at your disposal, from house ads, to issue wraps to online links. It's also critical to know production deadlines for these deliverables.
- 6. SET THE EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN.** Create a PR strategy for the new program, including writing the press releases, developing the press 'hit list,' conducting initial press outreach. Set the release and launch date.

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7. DEVELOP AN INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN. Inform all internal shareholders of the rollout plan and their responsibilities. Over-communicate with your sales team. Get internal buy-in on all aspects of the rollout.

8. ARM YOUR SALES TEAM WITH TOOLS, from PowerPoint presentations, to sell sheets and mock-ups to sales training, if necessary

9. SET THE TACTICAL ROLLOUT PLAN. Work closely with the sales managers to set up a client rollout strategy. Create a master schedule to keep track of client coverage and sales performance.

10. MEASURE YOUR SUCCESS. Establish metrics and financial benchmarks upfront. Record all incremental sales and compare to incremental costs for a mini-P&L statement.

New Marketing Trends and Techniques

Here are some ways to supercharge various elements of a marketing campaign to expand the reach beyond just the desired results and stretch the overall campaign's success.



- **Search Engine Optimization:** Consider hiring an expert in this field to get the most out of Web searches. By using smart and effective search words, you'll expand the audience.
- **Digital Editions:** Go beyond PDF attachments, which can end up in spam folders, for a more interactive and valuable option for customers.
- **Employ blogs as part of campaign:** Well-known industry bloggers have their own following and are an excellent way to capitalize on viral marketing.
- **Develop a microsite** that is targeted to a specific audience but can piggyback off a larger brand. Consider setting up a microsite for sponsors and advertisers where they can get extra information and updates on the campaign.



Getting Started

"The first and most critical step in developing a master plan is to work on your strategy," says Gordon Plutsky, director of marketing and research for custom media company King Fish Media. Determine what your desired end results are and the reason for doing the campaign. "It's also important to think upfront about the target audience while maintaining a customer focus throughout the process," he adds. A marketing campaign is not just about the launch of a new product. It will often have a greater goal, such as bringing a client more brand recognition. As Plutsky says, "News shouldn't be about your new newsletter, but about the customer and how it will help your client accomplish something."

"A big component of the strategy development is the messaging and that needs to be on target right from the get-go before creating the tactical plan," he adds. The plan should always serve the brand and the related messaging for the marketing campaign.

Another necessary early step is to get buy-in, both internally and from the participating advertiser or sponsor. This step can take up to a month, time which needs to be built into the master plan. Allow time to incorporate feedback from different people involved in the process and to explore what approaches and tactics have worked well in the past and what has underperformed. Stauffer recommends dividing up the plan for internal ownership and playing to people's strengths. One person may be great with the big picture planning while another is great on the day-to-day tactical elements. Both skill sets are required to execute any plan, regardless of the size of the endeavor.

The timeline should include both an internal and external communications plan. "Something I've learned over the

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years is to inform internal stakeholders—editorial, creative, circulation, sales and events,” Plutsky says “When beginning, get with them and communicate to all of the internal people. I can’t stress that enough.”

“An external communications plan may include customer outreach as well as press. It’s important to have a public relations strategy,” Plutsky says. Determine early on who will be on the press ‘hit list.’ Plutsky urges marketers to conduct early press outreach, including offering exclusives to select media individuals to give them the early word on the launch or program. “Don’t wait until it launches, or it will be old news,” he says. Build a press schedule into the timeline and make sure it manifests all the way through.

Two large parts of any communications plan are the tools and print collateral, from PowerPoint presentations and mock-ups for the sales staff to brochures and press releases. When drafting the master timeline—and any sub timelines—allow plenty of time to produce the collateral and other communications deliverables. Plutsky says it typically takes at least a month to develop those tools. “When you think about the production schedule for house ads or a new Web site, start backwards and factor in that production time,” he says. “Generally, we always factor in time at the printer; time with the Web designers, time with design. You’ll run out of time if you don’t accurately factor

in the time it takes to get something physically produced.” He also recommends “over-delivering” the tools for the sales team and suggests rolling out the sales tools a couple of weeks early so that the sales team has time to work with the tools and tweak them if necessary.

Supporting Sales

Marketing is all about helping sales sell and driving revenue for your company. Special emphasis should be placed on the sales effort and the communication with the sales team. “The greatest marketing ideas and programs will go nowhere without it being sold by the sales team,” Plutsky says. “Everything has to focus on driving that revenue and boosting the bottom line for your company.” He recommends creating a detailed plan for clients by splitting up country and territory and assigning marketing reps to key clients

Measuring the success of any program and establishing the appropriate metrics are critical to any marketing endeavor. First, determine how you want to measure the performance of the project or campaign. Whether watching the incremental revenue, tracking the ad pages or banners sold or measuring any increase in paid circulation, it should all be built into the timeline. “Track the results and hold people accountable for their deliverables,” Stauffer says.

A Sample Conference Marketing Timeline



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Stay Engaged with Sponsors

"These days, with savvier advertisers, readers and customers, it's also critical to be truthful and real, from the campaign's messaging to the promised results," Stauffer says. "People are looking for real messages. Truth, not hype. Stay true to your brand throughout the whole organization. Get everyone involved and educate them," he says. "Sponsors and advertisers know the game today. They know our real circulation, the analytics, etc. We have to be real with them and create consensus." Once a program is off the ground, it's time to monitor and measure it and to stay engaged, especially with sponsors. Stauffer suggests "touching advertisers" at least once a month through various media, from e-mails to setting up a sales blog with ad testimonials and additional information. "The point is to stay engaged," he says, "every month, one way or another."

The key to a successful program is to build all of that information into a specific, detailed timeline.

Proven Tips for Success

Here are some tried and true tips for developing a marketing project timeline that will ensure successful execution.



- **Planning is paramount.** Allow enough time to do the job right.
- **Keep it simple.** Start with a one- or two-page plan and go from there.
- **Build enough time** into the schedule for internal buy-in. Expect it to take at least a month to get everyone on board.
- **Don't forget production.** It takes several days or a week or more to proof, print and mail marketing materials. A common mistake is hitting the market too late because you haven't factored in production time.
- **Factor in at least a month** to do the external communications, from ads to PR. With events you need 12 weeks, minimum. Anything less is a mad scramble and potential disaster.
- **Create a detailed rollout plan** for your clients, at least two to three weeks out.
- **Keep track and measure the results**, including revenue, costs and profit—it's all about the bottom line.
- **Stay engaged, and engage everyone.** Use the same community-building techniques magazines employ with readers to engage advertisers and sponsors.

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PRINTING SERVICE

4295 Ohio Street
Michigan City, IN 46360
Phone: 800-382-0808
www.fosterprintingservice.com

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FOLIO:

10 Norden Place
Norwalk, CT 06855
Phone: 203-854-6730
www.foliomag.com